

STATUS OF ROUTES USED FOR THE MOVEMENT OF
MEN AND SUPPLIES FROM NORTH
VIETNAM INTO LAOS

1. The US/GVN air strikes against overland transport facilities and routes in North Vietnam have not prevented the North Vietnamese from providing logistic support for the Communist forces in Laos and South Vietnam. Losses in transport equipment have been more than made up by increased imports from other Communist countries. The capacity of specific transport routes has been reduced by the bombings but on most routes is still in excess of the present level of logistic movements. The North Vietnamese have shown, moreover, that they have a remarkable capability to keep supplies moving in the face of repeated attacks on the transport routes. They have diversified and increased the number of routes in the transport system in the southern part of North Vietnam. In Laos they have improved their truck routes by building bypasses and extending the road network. Truck transport is also being supplemented by the use of primitive forms of transport and the use of inland or coastal water transport. These improvements and improvisations have given the Communists the capability to move increased amounts of men and supplies into Laos and South Vietnam during the coming dry season. Even with an intensification of air attacks the capacity of the overland transport system would not be reduced below the level required to provide logistic support at existing scales of combat. The system is, however, inadequate to support rapid and full-scale deployment of division-size forces moving as units to South Vietnam. The overland transport system would also be increasingly hard-pressed to support logistically a sharp escalation of the scale of combat by augmented PAVN forces in South Vietnam.

The Transportation Network

2. The principal roads over which supplies have been moved from North Vietnam to Communist forces in Laos are routes 6, 7, 8, 15, 1A, and the 101/102/103 complex near the Demilitarized Zone. (See map) The fact that these routes have been and continue to be used by Communist truck traffic moving into Laos has been revealed by various sources, including the road-watch program in Laos that was initiated in 1962, an intensive program during 1964 to detect truck traffic by aerial reconnaissance over North Vietnam.

The attached map shows that only routes 15, 1A, and the routes to the Demilitarized Zone would be used for supplies being moved into the Panhandle of Laos and to Communist forces within South Vietnam. The capacity of each of these roads (except routes 102 and 103) before the bombing started was at least 100 tons per day during the wet season and more than 400 tons during the dry season. The bombing has undoubtedly reduced their through dry-season capacity substantially, but

considerable amounts of traffic continue to move to forward supply depots.

3. [redacted] the Communists have resorted to the use of ferds and ferries, and they have built bypasses and extensions in the road transport network both in North Vietnam and Laos in order to keep traffic moving, in spite of intensive bombing of the network and armed reconnaissance along the various routes. The North Vietnamese have emphasized that maintaining transport services is now one of their major strategic tasks. To maintain their supply lines within the country south of Vinh, they have allocated approximately 30,000 construction troops and laborers to repair roads and bridges. About 10,000 troops and laborers are stationed along route 1A and the balance along routes 8, 15, 101, and the rail line between Duc Tho and Tan Ap. There are also from 5,000 to 15,000 troops in the area performing military duties only.

4. Damage to the road transport network has also forced the North Vietnamese to resort to alternate means of transport to maintain and augment their existing supply lines. Since both inland and coastal waterways in Nghe An, Ho Tich, and Quang Binh Provinces offer relatively efficient alternatives to rail and highway transport, it is logical that the North Vietnamese would resort to the use of waterways in light of present bombing patterns. [redacted]

5. The North Vietnamese have apparently been able to increase the size of their truck inventory during 1965 in spite of the destruction of trucks by aerial attacks. Although more than 700 trucks have been destroyed or damaged (from 6 to 8 percent of the 1964 inventory), about 2,700 trucks were imported between 1 April and 20 November from China, the USSR, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. Thus the effective inventory has apparently been increased by at least 2,000 trucks, or almost 20 percent.

6. Within Laos supplies are moved on routes 12, 23, the new 911, 9, 92, 922, and 165 as described in detail in the attached memorandum published in October.* Photographic analysis and reports of ground observers

* OCS/IN, CFI No. 2506/65, Construction of Roads Will Make Possible the Strengthening of Communist Forces in North Vietnam and Southern Laos, 25 Oct 65. [redacted]

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received since then indicate that the Communists have built significant extensions or bypasses in this network. The normal capacity of the main access roads (routes 17 and 23) is about 400 tons per day during the dry season, and the capacity of each of the extensions and bypasses is at least 50 tons per day.

Recent Developments and Traffic Patterns

7. During 1964 bombing began along the Communist supply routes in Laos, and in April 1965 it was extended to routes in the southern part of North Vietnam. As a result the Communists relocated supply bases and developed alternate routes. The Vinh/Dan Thuy area in North Vietnam was the major base for the southern routes with a forward staging area for trucks moving through Ma Oia Pass located on route 15 near Tan Ap. Trucks moved from Vinh down routes 1A to Ha Tinh and west on route 152 to route 15 and the staging area. In early 1965 after the rail line to Tan Ap was restored, supplies were also moved to the staging area by rail. With the threat of bombing, however, this staging area was dismantled as were supply bases and military installations along the routes in Laos. The staging area and associated facilities apparently were dispersed further north along route 15 and further south into caves and camouflaged areas along route 101.

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8. In order to continue moving supplies south from the Vinh area, the North Vietnamese developed alternate routes, such as the portion of route 15 north of the junction with route 152. In addition, an inland water route to Cho Cai is being used.

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10. The Mu Gia Pass area apparently continues to be the most important dry season route into the Laotian Panhandle. In spite of repeated attacks with delayed action bombs on the Pass and on chokepoints on the northernmost part of route 23 since February 1965, the capacity of this route is still one-fourth of its previous level. The Communists have managed to keep supplies moving through the area by making rapid route repairs and by using porters. The bombing undoubtedly made the movement of these supplies very costly and, as a result, a bypass around these bombed sections of routes 12 and 23 apparently has been completed. [REDACTED]

25X1 [REDACTED] a road has been built through Ban Xonne, located about 6 miles south of Mu Gia Pass, and that during November trucks were continuing to move over this road. Although this road [REDACTED] the trucks can apparently move over this bypass from route 15 in North Vietnam to a point on route 23 about 3 miles south of the junction of routes 23 and 12. From there the trucks can either move south on routes 23 or the new route 911, the status of which is unknown. Road-watch teams are not yet located in positions to observe traffic on the probable bypass or on route 911.

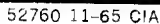
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11. An estimated 35 tons of military supplies moved daily down route 23 in Laos during the dry season from December 1964 to June 1965. After allowing for the needs of the Communist forces in Laos this amount of tonnage would have made it possible to allocate only 3 to 6 tons per day for South Vietnam throughout the year. Adding to these amounts the tonnage moving by way of route 1A and the 101/102/103 complex in North Vietnam and thence around the Demilitarized Zone into Laos, the total moving into South Vietnam has been on the order of 7 to 8 tons per day.

12. The diversity of routes that have been developed in North Vietnam and the extensions and bypasses now available in Laos, suggest that during the forthcoming dry season the Communists can increase substantially the tonnages available for South Vietnam if they elect to do so. The condition of the roads in North Vietnam and Laos is such, however, that there cannot be any significant change in the character of the supply and reinforcement operation. The roads are still too poor to support rapid division-size reinforcements moving as a unit to South Vietnam. The overland transport system would also be increasingly hard pressed to support logistically a sharp escalation of combat by augmented PAVN forces in South Vietnam. For

example, it is estimated that at least eight days would be required to truck the personnel and the basic load of a conventional and completely self-sustained PAVN division within Laos alone from Mu Gia Pass to Ban Bouang Nam on the Se Kong at the end of route 92. At this location the division would be about 30 miles from the border of South Vietnam in Khammouang Province. It would then have to infiltrate into South Vietnam over low capacity routes. When the division enters into conventional warfare* it would require 63 tons of supplies per day or a minimum of 21 truckloads. An unnumbered road between routes 923 and 165 is now in the final stages of construction. When this road is completed the network will be motorable to the border of South Vietnam and will have a theoretical capacity (without US/GVN bombing and armed reconnaissance) sufficient to support the daily supplies for 4 PAVN divisions (250 tons) engaging in conventional warfare. Nevertheless, PAVN divisions as units still will not be able to move to South Vietnam quickly, and within South Vietnam only primitive means of transport are expected to be available to the Communists, as a consequence of US/GVN air superiority.

* Conventional warfare is a level of combat committing each battalion to military action at least once in every three days. The PAVN and Viet Cong battalion equivalents in the Communist Main Force in South Vietnam are currently estimated to be in combat a maximum of once in every 15 days. This level of activity is higher than usual, and may not be sustained.



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OPTIONAL FORM NO. 10

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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : ~~D/ARR~~ *WKN*
WKN HOLD File

DATE: 22 Nov 1965

FROM :

SUBJECT: Request from O/DD/I, 22 Nov 1965

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[] received a telephone call from [] O/DD/I, requesting a memorandum on Laotian roads for the DD/I. This memo should discuss and analyze the main transportation road links between North Vietnam and Laos. We should attach our last memo on the subject also. Memo should identify main lines, give reasons for pointing these particular ones out as key links, give conditions of roads, and effect of actions on our part. There should also be a map attached which is keyed to the memo.

DD/ARR passed request to [] on 22 Nov. [] will have memo prepared for D/ARR signature to DD/I.

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